

## “Poor Mamma’s Panacea” —The Potato in *Ulysses*\*

Hsing-Chun Chou

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures  
National Chung Hsing University  
No. 145, Xingda Rd., South Dist., Taichung 40227, Taiwan  
E-mail: [hcchou@dragon.nchu.edu.tw](mailto:hcchou@dragon.nchu.edu.tw)

### Abstract

Wandering the streets of Dublin on 16 June 1904, it was not the latchkey which kept Leopold Bloom company, but a more indispensable talisman: the potato inherited from his mother. This potato is usually referred to at critical moments in the text. In the course of his wanderings, Bloom feels strongly reliant on this heirloom. For a long time, this shriveled potato is regarded as a talisman, corresponding with the moly Hermes gives Odysseus to protect him from Circe’s magic. But where does the “magic” of this talismanic moly come from? Why does Joyce depict a reminder of the Great Irish Famine, and thus a symbol of betrayal, as a talisman for his modern-day Odysseus? The shriveled potato in Bloom’s pocket, a talisman replete with significances carried by an

---

Received August 30, 2018; accepted December 17, 2018; last revised December 14, 2018

Proofreaders: Hsueh-Mei Chen, Pi-Mei Lin, Wen-Chi Chang

\* This article is the result of a research project sponsored by the National Science Council (NSC 102-2410-H-005-050). I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their careful reading and valuable suggestions.

Irish Jew, seems more mysterious than previously thought. This paper aims to investigate the significances of the potato in *Ulysses* by tracing the cultural heritages that have endowed it with various implications, including the Andean, the Spanish, the Irish, and the Jewish. The potato in Joyce's text is not only a complex symbol, but an icon of histories and heritages, and of the reality of daily life; thus its significations are multicultural and plural, rather than parochial and singular.

**Key Words:** potato, *Ulysses*, Ireland, talisman, food culture